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ABSTRACT

The current status of productivity and motivation research, particularly as they relate to communication studies and climate studies, is delineated in this paper, largely by a review of literature in these areas. In the section following the introduction, the problems of defining productivity and its relation to performance and communication are addressed. The next section discusses the various theories of motivation, including arousal, expectance, and equity theories. The following section reviews the three major perspectives on corporate climate. The final section makes several recommendations for future research that focuses upon the relationships among motivation, productivity, and climate and calls for the consideration of some factors often neglected by researchers. (JL)

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MOTIVATION AND PRODUCTIVITY AS A FUNCTION OF CORPORATE CLIMATE

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MOTIVATION AND PRODUCTIVITY AS A FUNCTION OF CORPORATE CLIMATE

There is widespread concern among practitioners that a productivity decline is taking place in the American labor market. At the same time a multitude of factors are contributing to a transitional phase in work-life that are continually testing the strength, flexibility, and adaptability of the industrial sector. These factors include the impact of inflation, the impact of required compliance with governmental regulations, the impact of a changing labor force (increased numbers of minorities and women), and, finally, the impact of a shift from goods-producing industries to service-producing industries (Downs & Hain, 1982). With all of this in mind, managers are in a continual search to find ways to turn the productivity decline around. It has become essential as a means to survival in the face of a sagging economy and increasing competition from international markets.

The purpose of this paper is to examine the current status of productivity and motivation research, particularly as they relate to communication studies and climate studies. A prevailing assumption is that if a manager varies the climate in the organization and in particular the communication aspects of the climate, he will also alter the motivation and subsequently the productivity of his employees. What results from a review of the relevant literature, however, is a very complex and unresolved picture of how these variables relate to one another, suggesting that there is still considerable research to be done in this area, perhaps, even at a more systematized level.

Productivity

In the ongoing effort to examine the effects of communication upon organizational outcome variables, there has appeared considerable research examining productivity and communication. These studies have been reviewed in detail elsewhere (Hellweg & Phillips, 1980; Downs & Hain, 1982), but some conclusions bear discussion both from a theoretical and methodological standpoint.

One of the major concerns evidenced in reviewing these studies and attempting to derive solid conclusions is a definitional one. Productivity has been employed in a variety of these studies as a variable (Goodnight, Crary, Balthrop & Hazen, 1974; Hazen & Balthrop, 1975; Tubbs & Judkins, 1978); performance was utilized as a variable in many others reported (Jain, 1973; Kim, 1975; Jenkins, 1977; O'Reilly & Roberts, 1977; Roberts & O'Reilly, 1979; O'Reilly & Anderson, 1980; Hatfield, Gatewood, Boulton & Huseman, 1981; Penle & Hawkins, 1979 a & b; Hawkins, Penley & Peterson, 1981).

Katzell and Yankelovich (1975) provide a relatively clear distinction of the two terms. Productivity from a technical perspective involves the ratio of output to input (for example, the ratio of units produced or dollar sales to capital investment or manhours); from a non-technical perspective it could be viewed as performance. In contrast, performance involves the behavior of workers or organizations with respect to some standard or goal. In addition to production or output, worker performance might also be described in terms of turnover, absenteeism, or the like.

A number of issues emerge from this definitional problem. Government statistics relating to organizational productivity rely upon output per manhour. This becomes a convenient indicator to compare productivity over time and between organizations. This measure, however, ignores

external factors which may impede or slow down output or the quality of that output. Another traditional indicator of productivity is profitability. This, again, is a convenient objective measure of productivity. However, both of these traditional indicators become troublesome when the analysis moves from industrialized companies to service-producing ones (Downs & Hain, 1980).

The measurement of either productivity or performance has varied somewhat in the literature. A multi-dimensional view of performance was employed by Jain (1973), Jenkins (1977), O'Reilly and Roberts (1977), and O'Reilly and Anderson (1980). In the studies reviewed at least, no multi-dimensional conceptualization of productivity was employed.

A single-item performance instrument was utilized in some of the studies reviewed (Goodnight, Crary, Balthrop & Hazen, 1974; Hazen & Balthrop, 1975). In one study (Jain, 1973), supervisor performance was assessed; in all other studies reviewed, subordinate performance or productivity was evaluated. Peers were involved in the evaluative process in one study (Schuler, 1979), in addition to supervisors and subordinates.

As Downs and Hain (1980) have suggested, linking performance with productivity has become a "standard practice." It is reasonable to assume that with improved organizational behavior, organizational output will increase. It is particularly desirable to associate the two variables when measurement of a non-goods-producing organization is involved. However, because of its non-quantifiable nature and disagreement over its dimensions, performance measurement has not been proven totally workable. In any case, the clear distinction between the variables needs to be drawn in the literature. Performance is the means

to an end and nothing more. Productivity, a desirable end, represents more than product quantity.

Communication, measured in these studies essentially as a correlate to productivity or performance, has been conceptualized in several ways: (1) as communication satisfaction (Goodnight, Crary, Balthrop & Hazen, 1974; Hazen & Balthrop, 1975); (2) as supervisory communication effectiveness (Jenkins, 1977); and (3) as supervisory communication and as managerial communication (Hawkins and Penley, 1978; Penley & Hawkins, 1979a). In some of these studies the variable was described as multidimensional within the organizational context (O'Reilly & Roberts, 1977; Roberts & O'Reilly, 1979; Schuler, 1979). Two studies examined feedback as it related to performance (Kim, 1975; O'Reilly & Anderson, 1980).

Various types of employees were surveyed in three of these studies. For example, Jain (1973) examined data emanating from a cross-section of service, technical, and professional hospital employees. In several of the studies surveyed, more than one organization or same population was analyzed (Kim, 1975; Jenkins, 1977; O'Reilly & Roberts, 1977; Tubbs & Judkins, 1978; Roberts & O'Reilly, 1979; Schuler, 1979). Various types of organizations were represented in the studies--manufacturing companies, service organizations, military organizations, hospitals.

Periodic performance measures were taken in three of the studies reported (Kim, 1975; O'Reilly & Roberts, 1977; Szilagyi & Sims, 1978). Some changes were noted in the variable measurement in two of the studies.

Communication roles were incorporated into the analysis in one study (Roberts & O'Reilly, 1979), as well as communication network types. Both positive and negative aspects of communication were examined in two

of the studies reviewed as potential qualifiers of the communication-productivity relationship (O'Reilly & Roberts, 1977; Roberts & O'Reilly, 1979).

Motivation

The majority of motivational studies have focused upon one of several theoretical approaches. Few studies are available that have tested motivational theories against one another or that have analyzed the appropriateness of one theoretical framework over another in a particular context (Mitchell, 1982). The fact that there is considerable diversity of opinion over motivational models has contributed to the complexity of delineating a better understanding of organizational behavior and particularly its relationship to outcome variables such as productivity.

Motivation is generally described as psychological processes associated with intentional goal-directed behavior that is initially aroused, directed by choice, and finally made to persist. In contrast to performance, motivation does not involve the behavior itself, but rather is focused upon the processes which will lead to it.

In the organizational context, this would suggest some commitment to a desirable goal and disregard for competing forces to the degree that it is possible. Motivation would then be under the control of the individual, performance or actual work behavior might not. Aptitude and environmental factors would have some effect upon performance; low performance is not simply a result of low motivation.

Some of the arousal theories of motivation have been those developed by the needs theorists, Maslow (Hierarchy of Needs), Herzberg (Two-Factor

Theory), and Alderfer (ERG Theory). Though conceptualized slightly differently, satisfaction of unmet needs is at the core of each of these theories. Individual employee differences are recognized by the needs theorists. The implication of all these theories is that organizations tend to concentrate more on fulfilling lower-level extrinsic needs than on higher-level intrinsic ones. The emphasis has been more on the necessity to recognize pay, work hours, and the physical setting as a motivational scheme rather than employee autonomy, creativity, and personal acknowledgment.

Keeping the needs theories in mind, the examination of a possible link between productivity and motivation is complicated by the perspective under which productivity is defined. An employee may derive considerable satisfaction (intrinsic) out of generating high quality craftsmanship, while the organization may view the time taken to generate the product as interferring with the organizational goal of high quantity output.

Alternative approaches to arousal theories of motivation include ones that focus upon social facilitation or evaluation apprehension (Ferris, Beehr & Gilmore, 1978). According to these theories, people become motivated by the presence of others and the knowledge that others are assessing them. Subordinates, peers, and supervisors create motivating effects through signals that reflect their expectations of the employee. These theories and others like them suggest a more external frame of reference for motivational determination and information processing of current elements in the workplace (Mitchell, 1972).

Probably the most pragmatic difficulty with the arousal theories is operationalizing what they suggest. Individualizing reward systems to

meet particular employee needs is problematic, particularly in view of union restrictions geared toward equity. Influencing social behavior norms in the relations between employees is also not a simple matter.

Motivational theories dealing with choice include expectancy theory (Vroom) and equity theory (Adams). Expectancy theory is based on three concepts: (1) expectancy, or the belief that effort put forth will result in successful performance of an activity; (2) valence, or the degree to which a potential reward is desirable; and (3) instrumentality, or the belief that a given performance is requisite to securing the reward. In the organizational context, high performance, according to the theory, will occur if an employee believes his behavior will result in the attainment of one or more goals. This theory recognizes individual employee differences.

Equity theory suggests that workers examine their efforts and rewards and are motivated to reduce any discrepancy that is found to exist between them. In doing so, employees compare inputs and outputs of workers of equal status. As is the case with expectancy theory, motivation is desired here in terms of an individual and intentional cognitive process. In addition, both approaches stress the influence of outcomes. In the case of expectancy theory, the employee would choose the level of work effort that would result in desired outcomes or rewards; in the case of equity theory, the employee would choose the level of work effort on the basis of equity with a selected referent.

These theories are difficult to operationalize from a few standpoints. First, since many jobs entail interdependency, separating out behavior and rewards can be problematic. Second, managers are limited in the degree to which they can observe everything their employees do.

This makes it difficult to tie rewards with behavior and to make everything equitable among employees. Third, motivational strategies for certain jobs change with individuals holding the positions. Finally, job heterogeneity creates difficulties in adopting reward systems that work for the various employees involved.

Corporate Climate

Organizational climate has been described in the literature from three perspectives (James & Jones, 1974; Hellreigel & Slocum, 1974). The first views climate as an attribute or set of attributes that belong to the organization. This "organizational personality" is seen as relatively stable. The employee, in assessing this climate, is assumed to be an objective observer of it.

The second perspective of organizational climate assumes an interaction between organizational attributes and the employee view of them. This perspective suggests the integration of both an objective and subjective assessment. Here, climate becomes a function of the way in which subgroups within the organization choose to describe it.

The third perspective of climate involves a totally subjective assessment by each individual employee. In this case, how other employees perceive the organization is immaterial. The individual makes a judgment of the organizational climate on the basis of a composite impression of his encounters within the organization.

Considerable variation is evident in the literature in regard to dimensions of the organizational climate construct (Falcione & Werner, 1978). While nearly all these studies show what might be viewed as "communication type" dimensions, the Likert (1967) version is most reflective of a communicative orientation: (1) leadership processes;

(2) character of motivational forces; (3) character of communication processes; (4) character of interaction influence processes; (5) character of decision-making processes; (6) character of goal-setting or ordering; and (7) character of control processes. It is interesting to note that both the versions developed by Likert and by Taylor and Bowers (1972) contain a motivational component.

Conflicting evidence is available in regard to a possible relationship between organizational climate and performance. Friedlander and Greenberg (1971) found higher performance in supportive climate conditions among the hard core unemployed. In contrast, Kaczka and Kirk (1968) failed to note higher performance where employee-centered climate was evidenced. In a study conducted by Pritchard and Karasick (1973) only two of eleven climate items correlated significantly with performance. Finally, Cawsey (1973) noted conflicting performance findings as a function of need orientations and organizational technology.

Redding (1972) described "ideal" communication climate in terms of five dimensions: (1) supportiveness; (2) participative decision making; (3) trust, confidence, credibility; (4) openness and candor; and (5) high performance goals. Dennis (1975) described managerial communication climate in terms of five dimensions: (1) supportive communication; (2) quality and accuracy of downward communication; (3) communication relationships with subordinates; (4) upward communication and upward influence; and (5) information reliability.

The Causal Sequence Model developed by Likert (1967) described relationships among organizational variables. Among those variables he listed as causal is organizational climate. Communication and motivation are among those designated as intervening variables. One of the

end result variables in the model is productivity.

Dennis tested his communication climate factors against variables in the Likert model. Considerable variance was found to be shared with Likert's organizational climate factor and the five communication climate factors in the Dennis conceptualization, suggesting some overlap in the two constructs. Some evidence was also produced in the Dennis study to question the designation of communication as an intervening variable in the Likert model.

Falcione (1978) found five dimensions of communication climate: (1) communication receptivity; (2) decision making; (3) organizational commitment; (4) coordination; and (5) communication satisfaction/ expectations.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this paper has been to examine the relationships among three important organizational variables: motivation, productivity, and climate. This analysis was predicated on two assumptions: (1) that productivity is a desirable outcome variable, and (2) that communication is, in one way or another, an integral part of the organizational climate construct or can be viewed as a separate type of climate construct.

In the Likert Causal Sequence Model, organizational climate is listed as a causal variable, communication and motivation are shown as intervening variables, and productivity is described as an end result variable. Hawkins and Penley (1978) envision motivation as a moderating variable in the communication-productivity relationship.

In an effort to posit a conceptual framework for the communication-productivity relationship, Huseman, Hatfield, and Gatewood (1978) developed an intricate matrix describing the factors involved. Communication is viewed in terms of three components: interaction content categories, interaction contexts, interaction participants. Three categories of moderating variables are described in the model: (1) individual characteristics, (2) task characteristics, and (3) organizational characteristics. Productivity is viewed in terms of seven components, one of which is motivation. The others are: quantity of output, quality of output, absenteeism, turnover, tardiness, and satisfaction.

A further development of the model was advanced by Huseman, Hatfield, Boulton and Gatewood (1980). Communication is described in the matrix as consisting of three components: message types, communication formats, and interaction participants. Performance is envisioned as having four components: quantity of output, quality of output, absences, and turnover. Three categories of moderating variables are delineated in the matrix: the individual, the work group, and the organization. Motivation is not given as a component in the matrix.

The studies reported that have investigated the communication-productivity relationship have done so in essentially a piecemeal fashion, focusing on aspects of the total process. The matrixes just described would suggest that many communication phenomena are involved, making it hard to see the totality of the process in any research study.

Productivity at the same time appears to be a complex multivariate construct. Evidence from the research studies is difficult to compile because of the definitional and measurement variations and the confusion

between performance and productivity. Transference of research evidence to the practitioner level is compounded by the economic and product quantity indicators used traditionally as productivity indexes in the individual sector.

While there are some studies available that have investigated the relationship of motivation and performance, they are limited to focusing on one of several motivational approaches. Little comparative research of motivational approaches has been pursued.

In a study by Hawkins and Penley (1978) the relationship between communication and performance was tested in view of Vroom's conceptualization of motivation. Organizational communication was found to affect employee motivation which in turn affects performance. In a subsequent study, Penley and Hawkins (1979a) demonstrated that expectancy variables function significantly in predicting employee performance only when communication is consistent between top management and immediate supervisors.

Cusella (1980) made sixteen propositional statements regarding intrinsic motivation and feedback on the basis of Cognitive Evaluation Theory. This research focused specifically on relational/message characteristics, feedback channels, feedback sources, and feedback recipients. From this set of propositional statements comes a potential framework for future research.

One of the principal unanswered questions about climate research is its stability over time. Additionally, there has been some concern that climate studies have utilized some evaluative scales, when climate is intended to be descriptive in nature (Jablin, 1980). The evaluative scales are more appropriately related to questions of satisfaction; the

climate-based descriptive scales are more directed at how things are.

The distinction between organizational and communication climates is a fuzzy one. For meaningful conclusions to be drawn in research studies, a clearer distinction needs to be formulated.

As is the case with motivational studies, studies of climate focusing on organizational outcome variables have examined, generally speaking, performance rather than productivity. This has complicated any attempt to connect the variables together.

In all likelihood an organization has many subclimates. At the macrolevel there are overall impressions of the organization. At the microlevel there are impressions of a work division in which an employee is assigned, and perhaps the analysis can be reduced even further. Climate at these various levels within the particular organization needs to be recognized as potentially differential. Research tends to mix individual and organizational attributes when the individual is the unit of analysis, but the conclusions are drawn at the organizational level. Individual "psychological" climate becomes fused with organizational climate in these assessments.

Because of the composition of many climate instruments, these studies tend to focus largely on supervisor/subordinate relationships. While supervisor/subordinate relationships are a key component of organizational processes, it is important to keep in mind other types of relationships in conceptualizing climate within the work group, since vertical relationships are not the only ones possible.

Recommendations for future research focusing on relationships among motivation, productivity, and climate include: (1) cross-organizational research (for example, a product-oriented company versus a non-product-

oriented company); (2) longitudinal research (for example, to test the stability of climate effects upon productivity): (3) research aimed at various employees (those with mechanical-type jobs where extrinsic motivation is more a factor versus those with creative-type jobs where intrinsic motivation is more easily actualized, or jobs which vary in information dependency); and (4) research aimed at looking at the variables within organizations which differ in size (ones where employees can have considerable access in vertical relationships versus ones where employees are more or less "numbers").

In such research, conceptualizations need unification. The productivity/performance problem is an example of this. Measurement techniques need consolidation if there is ever going to be an attempt to compile the evidence from such research. The totality of motivational sources needs further exploration; at this stage what is evident is simply varying approaches to the matter, rather than any comparative testing of models. Geering (1980) proposed an integrative model of motivation; such a model is worthy of examination.

The problem of individual versus organizational goals is a large one. In addition, organizational and individual goals are likely to be multiple, making them hard to track together. Some of these goals may be contradictory or unstated, further complicating the matter.

Consolidating the unit of analysis is another important concern for researchers. The individual employee has been the primary focus thus far. It may be helpful to consider the work group in these studies as well. It is critical that conclusions be drawn for the unit studied and not erroneously taken for other levels (for example, the organization on the basis of data collected from the individual).

A contingency approach appears to be the most suitable framework for the motivation-productivity-climate conceptualization. The research, while somewhat fragmented, clearly suggests that the most appropriate action a manager can take is learning to diagnose the members of his unit and then applying appropriate communicative strategies that will actualize the motivation of the individual employee to affect behavior that produces outcomes in accord with organizational goals. Key to this conceptualization is that employees are motivated differently and a multitude of factors are involved in this process. Setting up the appropriate climate can encourage such behaviors to emerge only if this contingency view is recognized.

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